

FWP Commission Agenda Item Cover Sheet

Meeting Date: January 13, 2011

Agenda Item: Fennon Slough No Wake Boating Petition

Action Needed: Tentative

Background

Kerr Dam regulates the upper 10 feet of Flathead Lake and subsequently backs water 22 miles up the Flathead River at full pool. Those 22 miles of river are abutted by private residences and agricultural lands. The river is popular for motorized and nonmotorized boating, waterskiing, fishing, bird watching, and waterfowl hunting. Surveys show boating use has quadrupled in the last 16 years. The lower river is abutted by seven major sloughs and several minor sloughs. The sloughs are old river oxbows and range from 600-800 wide. Fennon Slough is 215 acres, is the first slough upstream of Flathead Lake and Sportsmans Bridge FAS, and supports warm and coldwater fish as well as waterfowl. Landowners say high-speed boat wakes are causing accelerated bank erosion, damaging the ecosystem and endangering swimmers. Landowners have petitioned for a) no-wake boating status for the entire Fennon Slough and b) installation of a buoy maze and sign at the slough entrance.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Flathead County created a Flathead River Commission. This petition and various concerns over bank damage due to boat wakes and subsequent controls have been discussed. The Flathead River Commission is reviewing studies to separate out natural erosion processes from man-made cause but results may be years away. The Region 1 Citizen Advisory Committee reviewed this petition. The CAC recommended that the FWP Commission consider tentatively adopting the no-wake portion of the petition and signing requirement but recommended against tentative adoption of the buoy maze.

Alternatives and Analysis

- 1) No Action. Accelerated bank erosion and landowner discontent will continue. The Flathead River Commission may try to institute regulations.
- 2) Tentatively adopt No-Wake Boating Rule and direct FWP to conduct an environmental assessment and public outreach to better define problems and solutions. Bank erosion would be reduced.
- 3) Tentatively adopt No-Wake, buoy maze and signing rules. Direct FWP to conduct public outreach. Bank erosion would be reduced. Buoy maze would be hard to maintain and may pose a navigation hazard.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Adopt tentative No-wake boating rule and direct FWP to complete EA and public outreach.

Proposed Motion

I move a No-Wake Boating Rule be tentatively adopted for Fennon Slough and that FWP complete an environmental assessment and conduct public outreach on the proposal.